

[Sadie Johnson]

[?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Levi C. Hubert

ADDRESS 353 West 118th St., New York N. Y.

DATE November 2, 1938

SUBJECT TALES HEARD IN CHILDHOOD - SADIE JOHNSON

1. Date and time of interview

November 1, 1938

2. Place of interview

In bed-sitting room in small apartment of informant

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs. Sadie Johnson 353 West 119th Street. Man.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

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Mrs. Mary Thomas same address

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

A typical one room apartment now so popular for light housekeeping and small kitchen in hall, bathroom down the hall a few steps. Furnishings and furniture a mixture of modern and Victorian craft. Some pieces of furniture obviously landlord-owned, others owned by tenant as shown by careful attention to them.

Small hall light to satisfy the law.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Levi C. Hubert

ADDRESS 353 West 118th Street, Manhattan

DATE November 2, 1938

SUBJECT TALES HEARD IN CHILDHOOD-SADIE JOHNSON

1. Ancestry

American Negro

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2. Place and date of birth

Virginia

3. Family

None with informant

4. Places lived in, with dates

Virginia Philadelphia, New York, Brooklyn.

5. Education, with dates

A little grammar school

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Housewife Day's worker Cleaning houseworker

7. Special skills and interests

Cooking and sewing

8. Community and religious activities

Church her only interest

9. Description of informant

About 58 years old, grey-haired, weighing about 200 lbs. a widow, married 33 years, religious in speech and manner.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Levi C. Hubert

ADDRESS 353 West 118th St., New York, N. Y.

DATE November 2, 1938

SUBJECT TALES HEARD IN CHILDHOOD-SADIE JOHNSON

“One of the earliest of the many tales which have been told me and which must be taken on faith, rather than backed by facts and supported by evidence was the one my mother told me when asked when and where did she get me.

She said that she found me on a log down by the cabbage patch and I believed this for many years, for at that time there was no such thing as disbelief of the old folks. Today the youngsters not only jeer at mention of Santa Claus but they even go so far as to give you the lowdown on the Easter Bunny.

In my mother's parlor stood an old-fashioned gramophone with its large curved-necked horn. There was a picture of a dog listening to his master's voice and we children would peer intently into the dark horn and if a woman's voice came out of it, we strained and sometimes said that we actually saw the singer in the horn.

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On rainy days there sometimes happened that the sun would also shine and we children would place a pin in the ground and putting our ear to the ground we could hear the devil beating his wife, or 2 at least we had been told and we believe that we could hear him,

In my section of Virginia on the sixth of January was celebrated Little Christmas. At this time the animals were said to be able to talk and that they prayed on this night. I never went to the stables to listen but the boys in my family told me that the horses got down on their knees and prayed for their masters if they had been good to the animals.

Haunted houses were in our neighborhood, as what section doesn't have its supply of old weather-beaten ramshackle houses and queer goings-on. One house, which was in a large field, set aways back from the road. The portch was rotten and the boards had loosened with age. Weird lights often flashed off and on as we passed the old house on our way to and from town. People said that every month the old house actually rocked and shook itself and moaned and groaned and the children took pains to stay away from it at night. It got so bad that the preacher finally took the Bible and read a certain chapter out loud and after that the house and its 'hants' was quiet and respectable.

One night when I was a young girl and my beau (an obsolete word) and I was walking home from church a strange thing happened. The night was very dark, no stars were out, and of course there were no street lights. It was just one of those nights when its just pitch dark, like a heavy fog over everything.

We were walking along, not too fast because it was summer and I wouldn't see Jim 'til the next Saturday night.

One minute we were moving along all right and then Jim suddenly pulled me over to me, saying, "Look out."

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At first I thought he had seen a mud puddle but he hurried me along and when I asked him what was the matter he said, "Nothing. I'll tell you about it later."

He was sweating and by the time we reached home I was pretty nigh tuckered out, too. But as soon an we stumbled up the porch I could see that he was pretty scared as well as tired out. So he told me that he had pulled me over to one side, not because of a puddle, but because he didn't want me to walk into his sister who had been dead for over six years. It seems that when he was about nine years old and his sister about five, that one evening when his sister was playing in front of the fireplace, he had thrownd his sister's doll into the fire and then his sister had rushed into the fireplace after it, of course her clothes caught fire and she was so badly burned that she died.

Jim was sorry for what he had done and had begged to be pardoned for his sin, because he had dearly loved her. It worried him and after his sister was buried, she came towards him with her arms outstretched. I hadn't been born with a caul over my head and couldn't see her, but Jim said that if I had walked into her I would have felt something cold and clammy and he knew I would be scared. I never went walking with Jim again in the dark.

This caul that Mrs. Johnson spoke of is the intact placenta which often covers the face of the new-born child. When a child has this covering it is said to be gifted with the power to "see things." They are said to be able to see ghosts, are often warned in advance of things about to happen and spooks and hants to them have no terror.